

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

historic name Beulah Baptist Church
other names: NA; site number: DHR#100-5015-0002

2. Location

street & number 320 South Washington Street not for publication N/A city or town Alexandria vicinity N/A
state Virginia code VA county Alexandria (Independent City) code 510 zip code 22314

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X
_ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In
my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be
considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide X locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official

Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.
(___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register
___ See continuation sheet.
___ determined eligible for the National Register

Signature of Keeper

___ See continuation sheet.
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain):

Date of Action _____

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form
Beulah Baptist Church
City of Alexandria, Virginia
Multiple Property Listing: African American Historic Resources of Alexandria, Virginia

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing African American Historic Resources of Alexandria, Virginia

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: religious facility
church school
EDUCATION school

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RELIGION Sub: religious facility
church school

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19th CENTURY

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK other _____
roof COMPOSITION SHINGLES
walls BRICK

8. Statement of Significance

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Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☒ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
☐ B removed from its original location.
☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
☐ D a cemetery.
☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
☐ F a commemorative property.
☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ETHNIC HERITAGE Sub.: Black
EDUCATION

Period of Significance 1863-1953

Significant Dates 1863

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Unknown

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (See footnotes in Architectural Description and Statement of Significance sections of this form.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3,450 square feet

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing		Zone Easting Northing	
1	18 322200 4296800	2	___ ___
3	___ ___	4	___ ___
___ See continuation sheet.			

Verbal Boundary Description

Alexandria, VA: Map, 74.04, Block 03, Lot 14.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city lot which is historically associated with the Beulah Baptist Church.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elizabeth Calvit for the Office of Historic Alexandria
organization City of Alexandria date August 1994
street & number 301 King St., P.O. Box 178 telephone 703-838-4554
city or town Alexandria state VA zip code 22313

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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Summary Description

Beulah Baptist Church, built in 1863, is a front gable-roofed, freestanding brick structure located at 320 South Washington Street. Washington Street is one of the most important streets in the city and is home to several significant historic churches on adjacent blocks. The two-story structure's most distinctive features include a large stained glass window centered on the front facade, large flanking recessed brick panels, and two small decorative brick pinnacles at each corner of the facade. The church is located on the edge of "the Bottoms", a historically African American neighborhood.

Detailed Description

The three-bay facade has a parapeted front gable. A central entrance with a transom above a pair of doors is topped by a segmental brick arch. Above the entrance opening is a large stained-glass window spanned by a projecting soldier brick segmental arch and a brick sill. Between the entrance and the stained-glass window is a small, rectangular, brick, recessed panel. Above the stained-glass window is a recessed circular panel, inset with a rectangular stone that reads, "Beulah Baptist Church Organized October 1863." Two large, recessed brick panels flank the entrance. Small square pinnacles of articulated brick form the front facade near the intersection with the eave. The flat-topped pinnacles are finished with a metal coping. Raised brick crosses are located three-quarters of the way up the facade, just below the base of the turrets.

The north wall, visible across a surface parking lot, has two sections dating from different periods. The front section is divided into three and one-half bays, separated by brick buttresses. A brick exterior chimney stack is located between the second and third window bays. There are two horizontal rows of windows on the north side; the top row has six windows and the bottom row, due to the slope of the grade towards the street, has only three. The metal casement windows on the upper level of the north elevation feature stained glass. On the basement level, the metal casement windows are orange-colored glass.

The roof is currently covered with composition shingles. According to Sanborn maps, the roof was raised two feet between 1885 and 1902. In 1885, it measured 20' to the eaves, and by 1902 it was 22' to the eaves. The earlier map also shows two small buildings, one two stories and the other one story in height, attached to the rear of the church but by 1902 these had been removed. The roof was raised again some years later, and the newer brick has a different bond than the lower section of the facade. Most of the facade has pressed brick in a running bond pattern; however the upper half of the gable is six-course common bond. Similarly the front facade shows clear evidence of alteration of the brick in the gable indicating that the roof pitch was substantially increased.

A section added to the rear of the church is constructed of a different brick, both in color and pattern.

CONTINUATION SHEET

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The north elevation of the addition is two bays wide with two double hung, six-over-six, plain glass windows on the upper level, and a small window on the first level. According to a church history, the addition to the rear of the church was built between 1920 and 1923. Another series of alterations occurred between 1931 and 1953 under the leadership of the Rev. Albert Thornton.¹

The sides of the church are composed of seven irregularly spaced bays of alternating windows and buttress piers. A surface parking lot is located adjacent to the church on the north side.

Interior Description

The church is entered at the west end through a small narthex with two sets of steps leading up to the side aisles of a rectangular, open-plan sanctuary at the second-floor level. The original choir loft is elevated five steps above the floor of the west end of the sanctuary and is surrounded by a low wood partition with a scroll-cut, urn-profile, 1" x 6" flat balustrade in the manner of a Queen-Anne style porch railing attached to a solid panel. The lectern and organ are located on a raised platform at the east end of the room. The wood trim and paneling around the organ pipes also appear to date from a renovation during the Victorian period. Administrative offices are located behind the organ.

The vaulted ceiling of the sanctuary is constructed of a 2' x 4' lay-in tile and is washed by fluorescent lighting in side coves. Cylindrical, Gothic Revival lighting fixtures hang in the center of the room. The pews, prefinished 4'x8' wood wall paneling, and doors and trim in the rest of the sanctuary all appear to date from the mid-20th century, as do the stained-glass casement windows in steel frames.

A multi-purpose room on the ground floor is accessed from the narthex. The walls are clad in prefinished paneling with a 2' x 4' lay-in ceiling and composition tile floor on a concrete slab. All woodwork in the basement dates from the mid-20th century except for several doors which appear to be reused late-19th-century types.

¹ "Reflections from the Archives: 130 Years Looking Back" (Beulah Baptist Church publication, n.d.), 4.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Beulah Baptist Church is significant for its association with African Americans in educational and civic developments, both social and religious. The church was constructed in 1863, and also serves as the first contraband school in the city that formed by the founding members of the church. Beulah Baptist was the first church organized in Alexandria after the city's occupation by Federal troops in 1861. Located on the edge of an historically African American neighborhood, it was very important to the existing African American community and the new residents of the city.²

Historical Background

Educational opportunities in Alexandria prior to the Civil War were erratic, with a few schools and churches offering classes for African Americans. The city was a part of the District of Columbia prior to 1846, and Virginia state laws prohibiting the education of African Americans were not applied. However, with the city's retrocession to Virginia in 1846, most African American schools were closed. With the beginning of the Civil War and the occupation of the city by Federal troops, education was once again open to all African Americans and Beulah Baptist was specifically founded to provide educational services.

Alexandria experienced a surge in its population during the Civil War, as many African Americans left the South for freedom. Many African Americans living in the city joined together to offer various social services for the city's newest residents. One service provided to these people, sometimes referred to as "contrabands," was the chance to attend school. Many schools were established during the war to offer educational opportunities to contrabands.

In 1862, a religious group established a school for contrabands called the "First Select Colored School," organized by the Reverend Clem Robinson, who founded Beulah Baptist Church the following year. Classes were first held in the Jacob's school house located in the "Petersburg" neighborhood, or the "Berg." After the church was constructed, the school operated on the church's property during the Civil War. The school, like others in the city run by private organizations and churches, closed after the first public school system was formed in Alexandria in 1870.³

Beulah Baptist Church was established in 1863. A site was chosen and a parcel was purchased by Robinson and Mr. Dye Carter, who also oversaw the construction of the new church. As the war

² Department of Education, "Special Report of the Commissioner of Education and Improvement of Public Schools in the District of Columbia." Submitted to the Senate June 1868 and to the House, with Additions, June 13, 1870. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1871.

³ Department of Education, Special Report, 286.

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proceeded, one unfortunate result was the confiscation by the federal government of all lands within the rebellious states. Beulah Baptist was not immune to this and the congregation saw its land and new

church taken. Robinson was able to get the property back after the war, but not until after being required to purchase the property again. The school, however, continued to operate.⁴

Robinson and the congregation of Beulah Baptist provided religious as well as educational services for the contraband. Robinson was a energetic pastor, and an educated man, who was born in Brunswick County, Virginia. For reasons unknown, Robinson left the state for Pennsylvania. He received both a collegiate and religious education at Ashmun Institution, which later became Lincoln University, located in Oxford, Pennsylvania. Robinson began his teaching career in Pennsylvania. The laws of Virginia, in the 1830s, prevented African Americans who were educated outside of the state from returning. Until the city's occupation in 1861, Robinson was not allowed to return to Virginia. However, with the presence of Federal troops, he felt it was safe. The school at Beulah Baptist Church received aid and support from the American Free Baptist Society of New York and the American Baptist Home Missionary Society.⁵

The first teachers in the school were Robinson, his wife, the Reverend G. W. Parker, and Amanda Borden, all African Americans. Later teachers included Lavinia Lane, Martha Winkfield, George Steemer, Sarah Gray, and others from out-of-state. The first year attendance numbered 715, though the average number of students was much smaller. In December 1864, the average number of students was 280 and in 1866, the average number of students was 125. The school was eventually made a "free" school, meaning no tuition fees were charged. One reason enrollment declined was that several more schools for contraband opened in the city, relieving some of the pressure on Robinson and his staff.⁶

⁴ "Beulah Baptist Church: 130th Anniversary" (October 22, 1993), 4.

⁵ Special Report, 286.

⁶ Ibid.

There were actually three schools operating in the church during the Civil War; a primary school, a

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normal and theological school, and an evening school. The primary school had more students each year, and all classes were organized and operated in Beulah Baptist Church. Classes were taught in the basement and in a small building attached to the rear of the church that has since been removed. With the establishment of the city's public school system in 1870 and the retirement of Robinson in 1875, the primary school closed.⁷

In addition to its role in educating recently freed African Americans, the congregation also provided other services such as helping find shelter, work, and clothing, and providing a supportive environment as the new residents adjusted to their free life.

Beulah Baptist Church, since its beginning in 1863 to the present, has continued its mission of education and religion. It is a significant part of the history of African Americans during the Civil War and afterwards. It is one of the few remaining sites associated with "contraband" education in the city, and is therefore an important physical reminder of that period of Alexandria's history. The site is also significant because it was one of the first churches in the city founded, led, and operated by African Americans. It has been an active part of the African American community since 1863, and it is important to the history of African Americans in Alexandria.

⁷ Ibid.

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Section PHOTO Page 6

All photographs are of:

BEULAH BAPTIST CHURCH

Alexandria, Virginia

VDHR File Number: 100-5015-0002

Elizabeth Calvit, exterior photographs

Kristin B. Lloyd, interior photographs

All negatives are stored at the archives of the Department of Historic Resources in Richmond, Virginia.

DATE: April 1994

VIEW OF: exterior of church, looking southeast

NEG. NO.: 19169: 28

PHOTO 1 OF 10

DATE: April 1994

VIEW OF: exterior of church, looking east

NEG. NO.: 19169: 27

PHOTO 2 OF 10

DATE: April 1994

VIEW OF: detail of facade

NEG. NO.: 19170: 24

PHOTO 3 OF 10

DATE: April 1994

VIEW OF: detail of facade

NEG. NO.: 19170: 23

PHOTO 4 OF 10

DATE: July 1994

VIEW OF: side elevation, looking south

NEG. NO.: 19170: 25

PHOTO 5 OF 10

DATE: December 13, 1995

VIEW OF: sanctuary, looking east

NEG. NO.: 19032: 7

PHOTO 6 OF 10

DATE: December 13, 1995

VIEW OF: organ pipes

NEG. NO.: 19028: 23

PHOTO 7 OF 10

DATE: December 13, 1995

VIEW OF: woodwork surrounding organ

NEG. NO.: 19028: 21

PHOTO 8 OF 10

DATE: December 13, 1995

VIEW OF: second floor, raised seating at west end of sanctuary, looking west

NEG. NO.: 19032: 3

PHOTO 9 OF 10

DATE: December 13, 1995

VIEW OF: detail of partition around raised seating at west end of sanctuary

NEG. NO.: 19032: 4

PHOTO 10 OF 10